

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. – 20. (cancelled)

21. (Previously Presented) A method of warning a following vehicle that a vehicle in front, a leading vehicle, has applied its brakes, the method comprising:

in connection with each respective discrete application of said brakes of said leading vehicle during a braking process that results in a deceleration of said leading vehicle:

- (a) illuminating a brake light during a retention period of illumination such that said brake light displays a retention period visual format which is correspondingly indicative of the actual maximum rate of deceleration of said leading vehicle during the braking process,
- (b) during a fading period of illumination that commences at the end of said retention period of illumination, changing said retention period visual format of said brake light to a different visual format such that said brake light continues to be illuminated but has a different illuminated appearance during said fading period of illumination than its illuminated appearance during said retention period of illumination, said fading period of illumination having a prescribed blackout time at which the illumination of said brake light will cease, and
- (c) based upon a determined time at which said leading vehicle will come to a complete stop, alternatively (1) ceasing the illumination of said brake light at said prescribed blackout time in the event that said prescribed blackout time is not earlier than said determined time at which said leading vehicle will come to a complete stop or (2) delaying the time at which the illumination of said brake light will cease to a later blackout time which is no earlier than said determined time at which said leading vehicle will come to a complete stop in the event that said prescribed blackout time is

earlier than said determined time at which said leading vehicle will come to a complete stop, whereby the actual time after an application of its brakes at which said leading vehicle will come to a complete stop will vary as a function of the speed of said leading vehicle and the manner of application of its brakes and the illumination duration of said brake light of said leading vehicle varies in correspondence with the actual time for said leading vehicle to come to a complete stop to ensure that said brake light remains illuminated until said leading vehicle comes to a complete stop.

22. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 21, wherein, in connection with each braking process, as a function of the respective actual maximum rate of deceleration of said leading vehicle during the braking process

23. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 21, wherein said retention period of illumination ends generally when the rate of deceleration of said leading vehicle decreases from said actual maximum rate of deceleration of said leading vehicle.

24. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 21, wherein said retention period ends when the instant rate of deceleration of said leading vehicle is generally one-half ($1/2$) said actual maximum rate of deceleration of said leading vehicle.

25. (New) A method for illuminating at least one brake light during a braking operation, comprising:

determining a momentary value of a braking value during the braking operation, wherein the braking value is a variable that is characteristic of the braking operation,

causing the at least one brake light to be illuminated during the braking operation in accordance with the determined momentary braking value, wherein increasing momentary braking values are represented by increasing illumination of the at least brake light,

determining a maximum momentary braking value achieved during the braking operation, and

maintaining the illumination of the at least brake light unaltered in accordance with the determined maximum momentary braking value until the momentary braking value becomes equal to or less than a predetermined fraction of the determined maximum momentary braking value.

26. (New) A method as in claim 25, further comprising causing said illumination of the at least one brake light to fade after the momentary braking value has become equal to or less than the predetermined fraction of the determined maximum momentary braking value, said fading occurring according to a predetermined fading function.

27. (New) A method as in claim 26, further comprising:

during said fading step, comparing a first control value representing the momentary braking value with a second control value representing the illumination of the at least one brake light,

if the first control value is greater than the second control value, setting the momentary braking value as a new determined maximum momentary braking value, and

maintaining the illumination of the at least brake light unaltered in accordance with the new determined maximum momentary braking value until the momentary braking value becomes equal to or less than the predetermined fraction of the new determined maximum momentary braking value.

28. (New) A method as in claim 25, wherein said braking value comprises a measured vehicle deceleration.

29. (New) A method as in claim 25, further comprising detecting the speed of the vehicle at the beginning of the braking operation, wherein the at least one brake light is caused to be illuminated in accordance with a function of the said detected vehicle speed.

30. (New) A method as in claim 25, wherein said predetermined fraction is about one-half.

31. (New) A method as in claim 35, further comprising causing the at least one brake light to illuminate in accordance with a predetermined braking value upon detection of activation of an ABS system.

32. (New) An apparatus adapted to illuminating at least one brake light during a braking operation, comprising:

means for determining a momentary value of a braking value during the braking operation, wherein the braking value is a variable that is characteristic of the braking operation,

means for causing the at least one brake light to be illuminated during the braking operation in accordance with the determined momentary braking value, wherein increasing momentary braking values are represented by increasing illumination of the at least brake light,

means for determining a maximum momentary braking value achieved during the braking operation, and

means for maintaining the illumination of the at least brake light unaltered in accordance with the determined maximum momentary braking value until the momentary braking value becomes equal to or less than a predetermined fraction of the determined maximum momentary braking value.

33. (New) An apparatus as in claim 32, further comprising means for causing said illumination of the at least one brake light to fade after the momentary braking value has become equal to or less than the predetermined fraction of the determined maximum momentary braking value, said fading occurring according to a predetermined fading function.

34. (New) An apparatus as in claim 33, further comprising:

means for comparing, during said fading step, a first control value representing the momentary braking value with a second control value representing the illumination of the at least one brake light,

means for setting the momentary braking value as a new determined maximum momentary braking value, if the first control value is greater than the second control value, and

means for maintaining the illumination of the at least brake light unaltered in accordance with the new determined maximum momentary braking value until the momentary braking value becomes equal to or less than the predetermined fraction of the new determined maximum momentary braking value.

35. (New) An apparatus as in claim 32, wherein said braking value comprises a measured vehicle deceleration.

36. (New) An apparatus as in claim 32, further comprising means for detecting the speed of the vehicle at the beginning of the braking operation, means for causing the illumination of the at least one brake light in accordance with a function of the said detected vehicle speed.

37. (New) An apparatus as in claim 32, wherein said predetermined fraction is about one-half.

38. (New) An apparatus as in claim 32, further comprising means for causing the at least one brake light to illuminate in accordance with a predetermined braking value upon detection of activation of an ABS system.